

SECOND ADVENT MIDWEEK SERVICE

Luke 1:26-45

“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

As Lutherans, it might seem at times that we don't quite know what to make of Mary. She is the Mother of God, that is, of Jesus, who is at the same time and forever both God and Man. She is the handmaid of the Lord. She is, as Elizabeth says in our lesson, blessed among women. She is there at Jesus' birth, and she is there at Jesus' death, at the foot of the cross, a sword, as Simeon prophesied, piercing her own soul too. She is clearly an important person in the history of our salvation. Yet there's a tension, too, isn't there, because we know the abuses that have developed involving her at times in church history and in some churches? Some have gone so far as to pray to her for what her Son alone can give. Some have even called her a co-redeemer. That, we know, is unbiblical and false worship. It is dangerous, because it distracts needy souls from the one Redeemer, from His manger to the one beside it, from His cross to the one at its foot, from His wounds to the one who laments them. So how do we resolve the tension? Where is the narrow Lutheran middle road when it comes to Mary? Mary herself provides it to us, when she sings in her song, the *Magnificat*, “*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*” that God her Savior being none other than her Son, the Son of God, our Savior as well.

And so what can we learn from Mary about Christ and the Christian life? First, as we consider Mary's assent to the angel's words, it is important for us to remember that Mary placed herself in great danger by agreeing to God's plan, by carrying the Savior, conceived by the Holy Spirit, in her womb. In her day, an adulterous or promiscuous woman could well be stoned, as still at times happens in the Middle East today, and that is what Mary could well appear to be as others. Had Joseph left her instead of marrying her, she wouldn't be shrugged at as just another unwed mother. Her day was not as lenient as our own. Yet, without asking how God would protect her, she trusts that protect her He will, especially if such an important child was growing within her, the Child promised to Eve after the fall into sin, who would save His people from sin and crush the serpent's head.

Carrying the Son of God was surely also a great honor for Mary. She was highly favored, chosen of God, blessed among women. But notice that a great honor for Christians does not always mean great honor in the world's eyes, ease of life, or material blessing, for what would this Son bring her from an earthly perspective? She would give birth among beasts, be forced to flee to Egypt, have to settle in a new home in Nazareth, would be slandered for generations by those who rejected her Son as a whore and liar, would have to watch her Child killed most inhumanely, and then would be left a widow, since it appears Joseph had died by that point, entrusted by Jesus to the care of the Apostle John for her remaining days. If that is what God's honor brought one so highly

avored, so blessed, at least in this life, what should we as Christians expect in the here and now? No, the gospel is not a health and wealth formula for this life; it is grace, mercy, and hope in the midst of this life as we look to the next, to joy and peace in the presence of Mary's Son and God's Son, our Jesus, whom His mother no doubt longed with her whole heart to see again after His ascension.

Mary provides us with a wonderful example of faith. When God presents His will to her, she submits to it. We all know that is not easy. We've all bristled at times when called to do the same, to submit to God's will for our lives, whether regarding our bodies, minds, spirits, or possessions. It especially wasn't easy when it brought a clear threat of danger and harm. Yet Mary was well-schooled in Christian humility, and just as she gave all glory to God in her song after this lesson, so also she sought to bring Him, and not herself, all glory in her daily life. Mary is indeed one of the great saints of all time for such devotion to her Lord, yet even as such, notice how, rather than becoming puffed up and braggadocios, she remains within her calling as well. For instance, she doesn't usurp the role of Apostle or preacher, but is content in her role as the Mother of our Lord. She doesn't exalt herself above others, though she has certainly been exalted in her role as the Mother of God, but acts in such an unassuming way that she neither draws attention to herself or away from her Child. And we do well to learn of her, to pray for Christian humility like that we see in her, for it is, like faith, the gift of God, and to imitate her submission to God, to speak in every area of our lives where the Lord has spoken in His Word, *"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*

We Lutherans need not get uncomfortable discussing Mary, because Mary should find a happy home among true Lutherans, for she in her life strove to do nothing more or nothing less than what good Lutheran preachers are called to do in their preaching and teaching, than what good Lutheran laypeople are called to do in their daily life: she pondered Christ, loved Christ, submitted to Christ, served Christ, and through such lessons as this one still points us to Christ. Her very name draws Christ to our minds, for she is the one who through her agreement to God's plan has not put herself on footing with our Lord Jesus, but rather has given Him to us through her flesh, to be our Brother in the flesh, our flesh and blood Savior who in His great love has offered His flesh and blood on the cross and gives it to us in Holy Communion. It is this reality, this love of God that conceived our Lord in Mary's womb, joined Him forever with mankind in a way that He can nevermore be separated from us, brought Him forth from her on Christmas and eventually to Calvary, where Mary then gazed up in inestimable sorrow at His crucifixion—it is this reality and this love of God that drives our devotion to Mary's Son and Mary's Lord, that enables our cold hearts, warmed by the same Spirit through Word and Sacrament that wrought Christ through the angel's Word from God in the Virgin's womb, to answer God's call to us to faithfulness in the various aspects of our lives, *"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*

